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Hasina to attend funeral of Assad

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will leave Dhaka this evening for Damascus to attend the funeral of Syrian President Hafez Al Assad, reports UNB.

The funeral will be held tomorrow in his village home at Qardaha, 200 kms northwest of Damascus.

The Prime Minister will be accompanied by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury, Principal Secretary of PM Dr S A Samad, Foreign Secretary CM Shafi Sami and Press Secretary Jawadul Karim.

She is expected to return home on Wednesday.

Khaleda's new office at Banani

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia has taken a new office at Banani as alternative to the 29 Minto Road official residence, reports UNB.

Party sources said she will vacate the official residence with a caretaker government taking over power for holding general election due middle of next year.

Gas leakage

Negligence of JFF authorities blamed

By Staff Correspondent

Negligence of the factory authorities caused gas leakage at Jamuna Fertilizer Factory in Jamalpur on Friday, sources said.

At least 25 people were injured at a nearby market place when ammonia gas leaked from a plant at JFF during an overhauling attempt on Friday afternoon.

The victims suffered from irritation in eyes and nausea. Talking to the Daily Star yesterday, State Minister for Religious Affairs Moulana Nurul Islam said he had talks with the factory authorities on the day of the incidence and the officials admitted some negligence on their part.

The state minister, who was addressing a public rally near the factory on Friday afternoon, quoted the factory managing director as saying, "we would determine the faults after proper investigation."

The industries minister will visit the factory on June 13 and inquire about the accident," said Islam.

However, officials at Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation, which runs the state-owned factory, remained tight-lipped about the gas leakage incident.

Meanwhile, our Jamalpur correspondent reported that two of the victims of gas leakage incident were still receiving treatment at the district hospital. They are Mazhar Rahman and Morshed Alam, both aged 32 years.

Later on, many villagers staged demonstrations demanding compensation to damage of crops and tress by the leaked gas.

However, sources said there were barely any adverse affect on cropland except some banana-bud and banana trees and few juice fields.

Top ten in DB Humanities Group

Top ten merit positions in Humanities Group under Dhaka Board:

Nafisa Tanjeem (Roll 201295) of Vigarunissa Noon School, marks 896; Romin Tamanna (Roll 201198) of Motijheel Govt Girls' High School and Asifa Sultana of Rifles Public School and College (Roll 205739), marks 863; Md Younus Khan (Roll 228706) of Adamjee High School, marks 853; Sharin Shajahan (Roll 201192) of Motijheel Govt Girls' High School, marks 849; Tasneema Afrin (Roll 205365) of Agrani Girls School, Md Monwar Hossain (Roll 206588) of St Joseph High School and Mamun Sheikh (Roll 274261) of Dospolli N K High School, marks 848; Nurat Naznin (Roll 208710) of Mirpur Bangla High School, marks 846; Sonia Ahmed (Roll 201265) of Vigarunissa Noon School, marks 845; Syeda Nadia Hasan (Roll 205733) of Rifles Public School and College, marks 844; Sabrina Ahmed (Roll 205732) of Rifles Public School and College and Md Roish Uddin (Roll 251923) of Madhupur Shahid Smriti High School, marks 842; Nurunnahar (Roll 201119) of Motijheel Govt High School and Subarna Sarkar (Roll 241232) of Manikganj S K Govt Girls High School, marks 840.

Editor: Mazfuz Anam

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Main Opposition BNP brought out a torch procession in the city yesterday in support of today's dawn-to-dusk hartal. — Star photo

Budget discussion begins

All praise for govt while Opposition stays out of JS

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad, which began general discussion on the supplementary budget for 1999-2000 yesterday, was all praises for the economic performance of the government while the opposition members continued to remain absent from the House.

The ruling party lawmakers mainly spoke about the proposed budget, though they sometimes criticised the boycotting opposition.

The house went into a two-hour business after the session resumed at 9.30 a.m. following a two-day recess since Finance Minister S.A.M.S. Kibria presented the 2000-01 budget in parliament on Thursday.

However, the house lacked the lively exchanges, a usual feature during such discussion, owing to the opposition boycott.

Despite speculations there was no sign as yet of the mainstream opposition party's joining the current session, at least for briefly, for the sake of retaining their parliamentary seats. Many opposition lawmakers are running the risk of losing their membership due to a long absence from the house.

Deputy Speaker Abdul Hamid initially chaired the yesterday's sitting before handing over to panel member Prof. Ali Ashraf.

A visiting delegation from the assembly of the northeastern Indian state of Assam witnessed the proceedings for some time.

Three members from the Treasury Bench took part in the discussion on the supplementary budget after a motion of issues of public importance was disposed of. Earlier, questions and answers were tabled.

The discussants were whip Mizanur Rahman Manu, Abdul

Latif Siddiqui and Haji Mohammad Selim.

Manu said the budgetary provision will help rejuvenate the country's agriculture sector and benefit the vast population linked with agriculture.

He said the government has already spent more than Tk 4000 crore as subsidy for farm inputs, resulting in bumper crop productions that contributed greatly to the GDP growth.

The treasury bench whip also appreciated the increased allocation for education sector.

The literacy rate has increased to over 60 per cent. The investment in education sector will help the nation transform its huge population into productive human resources.

Abdul Latif Siddiqui said the dynamic and pragmatic fiscal policy of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government has revitalised the economy that suffered mismanagement of consecutive autocratic regimes.

Blasting the boycotting opposition parties, the AL MP said these parties, born in the cantonment, do not believe in democratic norms. "Instead, they are conspiring to nip our democracy in the bud."

Haji Selim dubbed the proposed budget "progressive" and said it imposes almost no new tax. He claimed the country is now seeing a surge in development activities.

He was quick to refer to the development schemes in his constituency covering Lalbagh, Kamrangirchar and Hajiribagh. He said the "area has got a different look with new roads, educational institutions and other civic amenities."

The refugees, who were headed for Italy, had set sail from the port city of Antalya, 600 kilometers south of the capital, Ankara.

The refugees included 95 Turks, as well as Indians, Bangladeshis, Iraqis and Moroccans.

Shaoun Barua stands first in Ctg Board

From Our Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, June 11: Shaoun Barua topped the combined merit list of the SSC examinations under Chittagong Education Board.

He secured 928 marks with distinctions in seven subjects.

Shawn appeared in the examinations from Chittagong Collegiate School.

Son of late Amalendu Barua, and Shelli Barua, a teacher of a Kindergarten School, Shawn intends to study computer science.

When the news of Shaoun's brilliant result reached their city residence at Ghat Farhadbagh, the members of the family burst into tears remembering his father Amalendu who died on the night before Shaoun's mathematics examination.

He, however, made it clear that there is no charge being made against Bangladesh gov-

ernment or people. The point is there are agencies active against the interests of India.

The high commissioner termed "completely untrue" the observations that some people with support from across the border in India are working against the peace accord in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The envoy defended the erection of barbed-wire fences along the frontier by India.

During the interview at his office, a broad spectrum of Bangladesh-India relations, problems like border skirmish, barbed-wire fence, cross-border smuggling as well as bilateral and regional trade and economic cooperation came up.

The high commissioner said: "It's possible that firearms are among the items smuggled from India into Bangladesh. It is also possible that among the illegal Bangladeshi migrants to India there are people sought after by your law-enforcing agencies."

He said Indian authorities seek to give the fullest cooperation in apprehending such criminals whenever information is conveyed to Delhi.

Mukherji apprehended that Bangladesh might also be used as a route to supply arms to insurgent groups in northeastern India.

He said insurgent groups might have been getting illegal arms from Southeast Asia. Cox's Bazar is usually used as a transit point.

He said some of the insurgent groups do continue to abuse Bangladesh territories. He had an explanation of the delays in ratifying the Mujib-India treaty by India. Different countries have different process of ratification, he said.

Bangladesh ratified the 1974 treaty relating to land boundary at an early date.

"Ratification remains however of little value unless the land boundary itself is demarcated," he said, adding that under Indian law boundary demarcation is necessary to be completed before ratification.

However, only a small stretch of the long-drawn border remains to be delimited.

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Deb Mukherji tells UNB Smuggling of firearms from India not unlikely

A top Indian diplomat didn't rule out the possibility of smuggling of firearms from India into Bangladesh and haunted terrorists taking shelter in his country.

"It is possible," said outgoing Indian High Commissioner in Bangladesh Deb Mukherji in an exclusive interview with the United News of Bangladesh (UNB) yesterday.

During the interview at his office, a broad spectrum of Bangladesh-India relations, problems like border skirmish, barbed-wire fence, cross-border smuggling as well as bilateral and regional trade and economic cooperation came up.

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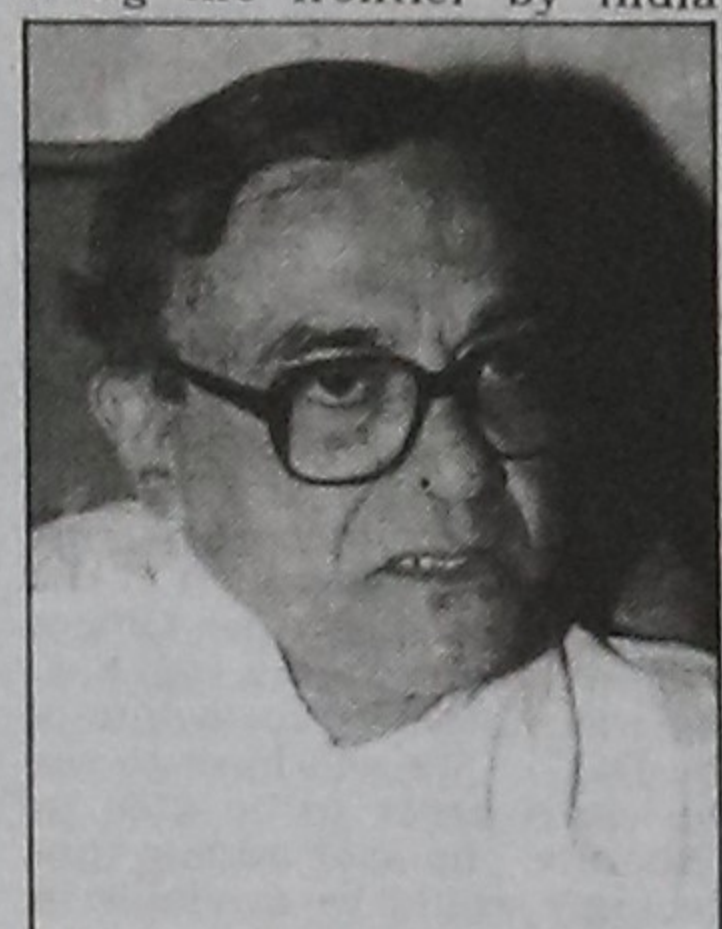
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Deb Mukherji

saying it would help curb cross-border trade and illegal migration.

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Party nominates Assad's son for president

DAMASCUS, June 11: The ruling Baath Party today unanimously nominated Bashar Assad for president to succeed his father, Hafez Assad, who died after 30 years in power, officials said, reports AP.

Later, Bashar was declared commander of the armed forces by Abdel-Halim Khaddam, one of two vice presidents.

The Baath Party's regional command, which met yesterday and today nominated Bashar, a 34-year-old eye doctor who had been groomed by Assad for six years, for the presidency.

The meeting was led by Suleiman Kaddah, the assistant secretary-general of the party, said the officials, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The nomination of Bashar was expected. It has to be approved formally by the rubber-stamp parliament, which is scheduled to meet on June 25. Once the parliament approves the candidate, a date will be set for national elections.

Top ten in DB

Business

Studies Group

Top ten merit positions in Business Studies Group under Dhaka Board:

Rahnuma Ahmed (Roll 402087) of Ideal School and College, marks 898; Md Nurul Hasan (Roll 400230) of Khilgaon Govt High School, marks 890; Sawgat Ibne Seraj (Roll 400113) of Khilgaon Govt High School, marks 889; Masuma Khatun (Roll 405650) of Rifles Public School and College, marks 885; Kaniz Sharmin (Roll 402086) of Ideal School and College, marks 881; Fatima Ruhani (Roll 402085) of Ideal School and College, marks 876; Mohammad Razwan Ullah (Roll 411438) of Mollar Tek Udayan Biddalaya, marks 875; Fatema Bushra (Roll 401705) of Vigarunissa Noon School, marks 874; Md Maniruzzaman (Roll 400598) of Badda Alatan-nesa High School, marks 872 and Md Jamil Sharif (Roll 405107) of Udayan Biddalaya, marks 866.

Saleheen thinks Question papers should help boost creativity

By Staff Correspondent

Firdous Saleheen of Ideal School and College obtained second position in the merit list of Science group under Dhaka Board. He secured 945 marks.

Son of Mohammad Alamgir Hossain, principal officer of Sonali Bank and Ayesha Begum, a housewife, Saleheen used to study five to six hours a day.

Saleheen told the Daily Star yesterday that he intends to study computer engineering. However, he would not mind to be a doctor. He likes to read novels during his leisure.

Saleheen said a student should read extensively to understand a subject instead of memorising it. He suggested more technical and up-to-date question papers to help students develop whatever creativity they have.

Kuerten captures French Open

PARIS, June 11: Fifth-seeded Gustavo Kuerten of Brazil won the French Open men's singles title on Sunday with a 6-2, 6-3, 2-6, 7-6 (8/6) win over third-seeded Swede Magnus Norman in the final, reports AFP.

Kuerten sealed the win on his 11th match point after 3hr 44min thriller.

It was only the second Grand Slam title of Kuerten's career but the second in four years at Roland Garros for the King of Clay.

Norman, the current leader of the ATP Champions' Race, had dropped only one set in reaching the final but melted under the pressure of his first Grand Slam final in the opening two sets.

It was Kuerten's fourth win in six meetings with Norman and means he will top the Champions Race when the new list is issued on Monday.

Mop-haired Kuerten took out his eighth career title and third of the year and has now won 32 of his last 38 matches.

—AFP photo

PM for expansion of trade with India

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stressed the need for expansion of trade and commerce among the neighbouring countries, reports UNB.

"More items should be traded with the neighbours which would help reduce trade gap between Bangladesh and India," she said. She also emphasised the need for easing up regional communications in this regard.

The PM thanked the Assamese delegation for visiting Bangladesh.

She also apprised the team of housing scheme for the poor undertaken by her government.

The government emphasised on poverty alleviation and launched a number of projects in this regard.

The PM thanked the Assamese delegation for visiting Bangladesh.